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China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Security Implications for India

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ABSTRACT

China and India, two Asian powers, are busy challenging each other in the maritime domain in the 21st century. Though they used to flex their muscles more in the border area. The maritime conflict is new in their relationship. The part of the flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is expected to provide a strong economic boon for countries in South Asia. The Chinese ambitious project is aimed at economic development of Pakistan and adjacent countries. The strategic move of nations is a lifeline for survival in the era of competition for geopolitical space. In the 21st century two Asian powers are busy with geopolitical clout not seen before. The Corridor is an ambitious project undertaken by China with strategic intentions in mind. China wishes to replace the power dynamics of the Indian Ocean. The Project would connect the port city of Gwadar of Pakistan's province of Balochistan to the Kashgar of Xinjiang province of Chinese northwestern region. The project was awarded for management to Chinese Overseas Port Holding in the year 2013 (Rahman et al., 2021a). The project was signed between China and Pakistan in 2015. It was a great deal for the development of the mega corridor. The agreement was signed that amounted to nearly USD 46 billion of investments. The project seems to be of great economic value and would bring national development to Pakistan. Moreover, the project is intended to develop China's impoverished province of northwest. The project is intended to change the face of the economy of China and Pakistan and enormous progress in the region. The project would bring China's geopolitical influence and have greater clout in South Asia in particular and Arabian sea in particular. Chinese massive investment and military alliance with Pakistan will impact India. The easy access of China to the region adjacent to the border of India would bring the Indian security establishment on toes. The CPEC would make a great impact on the security and defense of India.

Key Words: Geopolitical, CPEC, Gwadar, Security, China, India, Pakistan

Introduction

The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean after the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean (Schneider, (2012). The ocean is vital links connecting to different parts of the world. The ocean is playing an important role in the 21st century as major powers of the world are competing for gaining geopolitical clout and strategic competition not seen earlier. CPEC is China's ambitious project under China's BRI (Border Road Initiative). The project commenced its journey in 2013. The CPEC project is the brainchild of Chinese Premier Xi Jinping. The dream mega project BRI and its maritime version Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is a dream project to counter the Chinese adversaries in South Asia. According to Xinhua newspaper the CPEC is a corridor connecting Gwadar port of Pakistan located in the Southwest coast of Pakistan. The Gwadar port connects with Kashgar in northwest China's Xinjiang province where Chinese Uyghur minorities are located. The project intended to bring development in the Xinjiang province as easy availability of energy through the CPEC enables industrial development (Xinhua, 2023). The CPEC and Gwadar, two geopolitical hotspots, are in limelight due to its strategic position. The CPEC is being built by a Chinese company to transport oil and gas from gulf and other oil producing countries to Xinjiang province in the northwestern region. The port of Gwadar is developed by China connecting the CPEC to the Indian ocean. The ambition of China is not only to save time and distance but also control over Indian ocean vital chokepoints and control over the Indian ocean (Orland, 2012).

The construction of CPEC and naval build-up of Gwadar port will be disastrous for India. China's PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) will be able to contain and challenge the Indian navy and other allies of India. The ever expanding of Asia's two big powers, India and China depend on oil and seaborne materials imported from Middle East and Africa to feed the industries. The imports are carried out through Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs). The booming economies of two nations need continuous energy supply from the west to sustain their development which started in the second half of the 20th century. But the precondition for safe arrival of energy needs a security shield from adversaries. China is located far away from the Indian ocean and has no established naval base. So, China is desperately searching for a landing platform and geopolitical footprint in the Indian ocean for its PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy). China is busy with the process of expansion of its clout in the maritime domain. CPEC and Gwadar are two ambitious long term projects of China aimed at a geopolitical footprint in the Arabian Sea in particular and Indian Ocean in general. China is very assertive to contain the adversaries in the Indian Ocean and beyond. China is claiming the whole South China Sea (Pant, 2012) and violating the United Nations Convention of the Laws of Seas (UNCLOS). CPEC runs through the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir (Farooq & Khawaja, 2020a). The article

is divided into two sections and a conclusion. In the first section the significance of CPEC is analyzed, in the second section implications of CPEC for India is explained and in the last the article ends with a conclusion.

Significance of CPEC

China's maritime strategy in the Indo-Pacific is gaining traction in the 21st century. China wishes to become a superpower so giving attention to its navy, as controlling the maritime domain is vital for any super power. China is trying all out strategies to desist India from becoming an Asian power. China undermines India as an Asian power and is assertive to undermine India. It can be sensed how a sovereign state feels when any rival state builds a mega project over a disputed region of other countries. China is building a mega project through a disputed territory of India and Pakistan. It will pose great security concerns for India after commissioning of the project. The project undermines the territorial integrity of Jammu Kashmir and the rivalry and tense situations are encouraged. India is average to join the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) due to sovereignty issue and opaque nature of BRI. CPEC certainly poses security problems for India and hampers its national interests. According to Zia Ur Rahman and others (2021), the corridor has geopolitical leverage of China in the Indian Ocean and makes a tremendous breakthrough in the favor of China. The 3000 km long route makes China bypass the sea route and oil from the gulf would be transported by this to the underdeveloped area located northwest of China. China can bypass the supply lanes of Communications (SLOCs). The Indian Ocean was not always important in the geopolitics calculation of world powers in the earlier decades of 1900s. In the 21st century the Indian Ocean is making headlines due to its strategic location and possession of huge natural resources. It made a prominent position in the geostrategic hand book of the world powers after the end of 1960s as has been explained by the authors. They have elaborately discussed India's security implications after completion of the project. As per their studies, the energy abundance of the Indian Ocean is a crucial element for attaching so much significant geopolitical leverage to the CPEC. The Indian Ocean transports more than 50% of crude oil and petroleum. The Ocean is also the reservoir of a vast source of oil and gas. As per their papers about 80% of China's, 90% each of Japan's and South Korea's oil are transported through the Indian Ocean (Rahman et al., 2021b). According to Sunniva Engh (2021), China's mega project, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is a part of BRI (Farooq & Khawaja, 2020) passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The project is funded by a Chinese Port Holding company. The area through which it is passing in Gilgit-Baltistan is a disputed area as it is called by India POK. India is under Chinese threats and containment radar (Engh, 2021). Ian Hall (2019) notes that India has expressed its concerns of the CPEC construction as it is passing through the disputed region and securing China's national interests instead of collective interests. It is a unilateral decision serving China's power ambition (Hall, 2019). Zia Ur Rahman and others (2021) notes that China is aiming to bypass the Malacca strait for transportation of energy and so China is looking for new pathways. The CPEC will be a very strategic pathway as it can control the northwestern frontier of India. China's army can deploy its battalion in a short time in the western sector of India and it can mobilize its force to the Indian ocean through Gwadar. CPEC is an economic corridor but underlying intentions are easily understood. China and Pakistan, two all-weather friends, are bitter enemies of India so their intentions are to contain India and to stop India becoming a dominant power in Asia. Though it is an economic corridor, military use of the corridor by China cannot be ruled out. It can be armed by China and can cut off the oil supply of India from the gulf. The Strait of Hormuz choke point can be blocked if tensions between India and China break out. After commissioning of the CPEC the naval build up by two friends; China and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean would pose a security challenge for India. CPEC is a strategic corridor that can be a great challenge for India and Indian Ocean littoral nations. CPEC has great potential to challenge Indian rise and can interdict energy and trade supply lines of India coming via Strait of Hormuz. China constructed CPEC for various reasons. The most crucial one for strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean via Pakistan Occupied Kashmir which is a disputed area, (Rahman et al., 2021c) it is a grave security concern for India (Farooq & Khawaja, 2020d) as it is passing through the disputed area. China's assertive move aided and helped by all-weather friend Pakistan which is the key ally of China. CPEC will benefit China in the multiple front like access to the Indian Ocean, Middle East from where large chunks of oil and gas are imported and other trade take place. China's strategic thinking about the Indian Ocean is protection of SLOC for the energy resources. China knows where its shoe pinches, its sea routes are highly at risk to threats from various actors especially through choke points through which most trade passes. China's 40% oil comes from the Hormuz straits and 82% of oil imports transported via the narrow Malacca straits is liable to block any time by potential adversaries. Former President of China Hu Jintao called it the "Malacca Dilemma" (Brewster, 2018). China aimed to protect its trading route for safe transportation of traded resources from gulf and other nations, So, the protection of Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) propelled China to have easy access to the Indian Ocean. Moreover, China cannot see a second power in Asia that can challenge its superpower ambitions in Asia and for the whole world. China also aimed to have a military presence in the vicinity of India (Rahman et al., 2021d) to deter it and to have surveillance over India.

CPEC: Security threats for India

The project is likely to impact the security of India. The combined assertive move of India's arch rival can be disastrous for India. The project can be a potential security nightmare for India as China is a hegemonic power and expansionist power also. In the 21st century two Asian powers are busy challenging each other. The perennial border issue is the main bone of contention and finds no solution. The construction of CPEC would add fuel to the existing fire on the border problem. A. Maqsood (2021), argued that China and Pakistan are busy protecting their national interests and economic progress by means of geostrategic motive in mind. A project like CPEC is a great strategic chessboard in the vicinity of India. The project would be a huge benefit for China's Central Asian access and to its less developed Xinjiang province. Indian territorial claim of POK will be deterred by the existence of People's Republic of China in the vicinity of India. Moreover, this will provide great leverage for Pakistan against India. Pakistan can balance India's power projection in the region (Maqsood, 2021). The CPEC project has great security implications for India in the Arabian sea and in the western border of India. The CPEC passing through the disputed area of Gilgit-Baltistan which India claims as its own territory, is a grave violation of the sovereignty of

India. Moreover, the CPEC will provide the People's Liberation Army an easy and quick access to the western border of India to have an added advantage to encircle India. So, it is argued that CPEC can be a great security and sovereignty concern for India and others. Don McLain Gill opined that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can stop India's interests in the IOR. The corridor is passing through the contested region of Gilgit-Baltistan which India claims as its own territory. China does not want the issues to be solved in India's favor as the POK is the physical "Umbilical Cord" between China and Pakistan. Moreover, earlier Pakistan ceded thousands of square kilometers of land which India claimed on its own in the POK to China. The CPEC would provide China a commanding position and swift deployment of military (Rahman et al., 2021e) in the Indian Ocean and it can be a nightmare for Indian security managers (McLain, 2019). According to Global Times correspondent Shi Lancha, Gwadar is a strategic spot of China in the Arabian sea. The port is likely to monitor the Naval movement of China's adversaries. China can use it for the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) for monitoring the submarines and other naval vessels in the Persian Gulf. The port is one of China's maritime strategic ports floating in the air (Lancha, 2016). The CPEC through Gwadar port China is connected to the Arabian sea. This easy and short distance will provide China quick access to the Arabian sea and further to the Indian ocean and beyond. Savita Pande in her article "Sino-Pak Strategic Relationship: Implications for India" The strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan is going to be a major concern for India. China's involvement in Afghanistan Taliban dialogue: an issue of concern for India vis-à-vis its interests in Afghanistan. The implications of the CPEC is more grave security threats to India as the project enhances the presence of both countries in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea where it can have decisive control over the Strait of Hormuz through Gwadar port, it adversely impacts India's growing economic and military power (Pande, 2015). According to Sumita Kumar, China has undertaken multidimensional development projects in Pakistan and supports it in various political, economic and security sectors. Gwadar is a Chinese maritime point of China's Maritime Silk Route enhances trade and commerce. But in geostrategic lens it will provide China's PLAN the base to monitor the naval activities of India and its allies. It can constrain naval cooperation in the Persian Gulf and Arabian sea. China is building various projects and development works in the Gilgit-Baltistan sector under the aegis of CPEC. The development of this area has great security implications for India as the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) will be able to deploy its forces quickly to the disputed site of India and Pakistan. China is disregarding the position of India as the CPEC is passing through the Gilgit-Baltistan province which is a disputed territory between India and Pakistan (Kumar, 2015). Asha Sundaramurth in her article stated that "China's increasing influence in the Indian Ocean through the One Belt One Road (OBOR) and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) has also raised concerns for New Delhi. The primary reason for India's caution is due to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the OBOR, that passes through the contested areas of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, areas which New Delhi considers its territory (Sundaramurthy, 2020)." Umar Farooq and Asma Shakir Khawaja stated that India is strongly against the CPEC that is passing through the disputed territory of Kashmir valley that was claimed both by India and Pakistan. Former Indian foreign minister Susma Swaraj expressed her unwillingness and strongly protested the project. India claimed that the CPEC is running through the disputed area of POK which violates the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India. India has been against the project since the inception of the mega project in Beijing in 2017. The project disregards the core concerns of India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Some Indian scholars consider CPEC as a part of colonialist agenda and a threat to India's domestic security on part of China by developing the Gwadar port project and securing access to the Indian Ocean region. Some Indian scholars consider CPEC as a part of colonialist agenda and a threat to India's domestic security on part of China by developing the Gwadar port project and securing access to the Indian Ocean region (Farooq & Khawaja, 2020b). Brahma Chellaney (2010) notes that China is building massive infrastructure projects from the middle east to south China Sea and collaborating with the littoral and Island nations of the Indian Ocean. China intended to influence the entire Sea Lanes of Communications from Indian Ocean to Pacific Ocean through building of bases, naval facilities and defence ties. CPEC and Gwadar are such a project that impacts Indian security (Chellaney, 2010). David Scott also echoed the security concerns for India related to Gwadar in the Arabian Sea. China with military facilities at Gwadar would be putting challenges to Indian security and safe transport of oil and gas coming from the Strait of Hormuz. Chinese dragons in the vicinity of India would be disastrous (Scott, 2013). Umar Farooq and Asma Shakir Khawaja notes that

"China would reap great strategic and economic booms from CPEC. China aspires to counter the separatist outfits in the region with the transformation of economic enhancement in China's Xinjiang province. As part of CPEC, Gwadar will provide the western China with shorter, economical and safer routes. China's crude oil dependency on the Gulf and Iran is approximately 47 per cent from its total consumption. The complete inland distance from eastern China to western China will be cut from 16,000 km to 3,000 km. Also, Gwadar, as a pivot provides economic security to China" (Farooq & Khawaja, 2020c, p.594).

Conclusion

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor project of China has much geopolitical leverage and can be a great project to embark upon strategic space of India's vicinity. In the 21st century China is very assertive and making all round efforts to gain a robust footprint in the oceanic realm via this geopolitical project which is claimed as an economic project is a worrisome and grave challenge for India. China is the guise of an economic project making bases for its navy. The project not only has potential for disruption of India's energy supply but also strengthens the Indian arch rival Pakistan militarily. To check the rival China, India should play a more dynamic role in the Iran and Persian Gulf countries. India also can play the Taiwan card. India can develop the strategic island of India like Andaman and Nicobar Islands which is a very strategic island that can be used for outreaching ASEAN countries so that influence of the Chinese can be checked. This island is located in a very strategic position and can be used for multiple purposes, only sound and robust planning and allotment of funds required with political will necessary for this end. Indian maritime strategy was so far Pakistan centric. Now India should have a broader maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean and beyond it. India should reach to Seychelles, Maldives, Sri Lanka to make strategic ties for naval bases. Moreover, India should develop more nuclear attack submarines and AIP mounted diesel electric submarines to deter the Chinese PLAN in the Indian Ocean and beyond. India can take a cooperative security Initiative for tackling ever growing natural disasters, terrorism, piracy and blockade the

vital choke point of Malacca strait spreading in the Indian Ocean the vital gateway to Pacific Ocean from Indian Ocean located at south of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

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